FROM CAMBRIDGE TO CAMIERS

Under the Red Cross

E. M. Spearing

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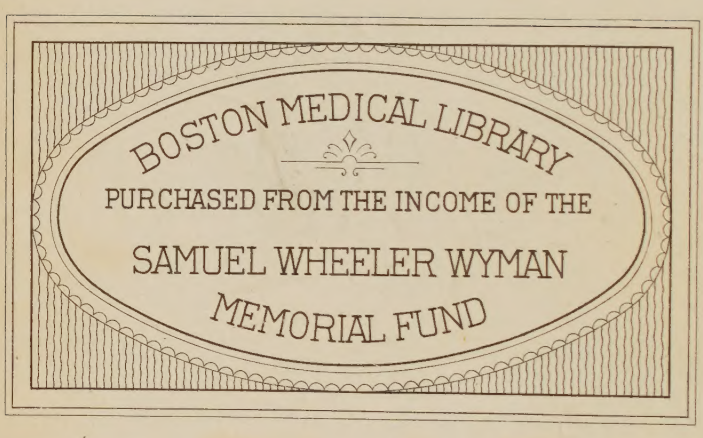
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FROM CAMBRIDGE TO CAMIERS
UNDER THE RED CROSS.

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FROM CAMBRIDGE TO CAMIERS UNDER THE RED CROSS

BY

E. M. SPEARING, V.A.D.

Associate and late Fellow of Newnham College, Cambridge.

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PREFACE

This is no record of thrilling adventures at the front. It is merely a series of sketches, by an ordinary V.A.D. member, of life during the war, first in Cambridge at a Red Cross Hospital, and then in various military hospitals in France. I wrote them at odd moments to tell friends at home what I was doing, or sometimes only to amuse myself during long hours on night duty, and I have collected them here because they form a record—imperfect and full of gaps, it is true—of what has been to me a very wonderful time.

When war broke out I was engaged in research work on certain Elizabethan dramas. My book was being published in a series of Elizabethan reprints then appearing at Louvain, and its second volume, which was in the printers' hands, perished in the destruction of the Louvain University Press. I have found ample compensation, and much more, for its loss, in the Red Cross work here described.

The fourth chapter has already appeared in print under the title "With the V.A.D. in France : Winter" in the *Englishwoman* for June, 1916, and parts of the fifth and sixth have been published in the *Newnham College Letter*. My thanks are due to the Editors of these magazines

for permission to reprint them here. I must also record my thanks to the Hon. Arthur Stanley, Chairman of the Joint Committee of the British Red Cross Society and the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, who has given the Society's permission for the publication of the book.

Cambridge in War Time.

CAMBRIDGE nowadays is amazingly different from the place we all of us knew so well. Perhaps there is no other town in England, except the East Coast sea-ports and the sister University of Oxford, that has been so hard hit by the war. Not that it has suffered material damage from Zeppelins or bombardments, but the life of the place has undergone an astounding change. Cambridge as a town drew all its vitality from the University. The throngs of gay and careless undergraduates who used to saunter along Trinity Street and K.P. have disappeared, and with them have gone the life and animation of the town. Gone are the brilliant socks, the mustard-coloured waistcoats that adorned Cambridge three years ago. Gone are the blazers, the football shirts, the hockey sticks, the rowing shorts. Gone, too, is the self-assurance of the 'nut,' who walked the streets in the proud consciousness that all eyes were upon him. Yes, the glory of the undergraduate is departed, and Cambridge is proud of the fact. She is proud that her best and her strongest are with her no longer, that they have given their oars for swords and their sticks for rifles, and have left Fenner's and the Cam for Salonica or 'somewhere in France.' The dons, it is true, remain in their accustomed quarters, but the greater

part of their occupation in life has gone. The Senior Tutor has perhaps twelve men instead of a hundred to interview. There are no 'rags' to give the Proctors nocturnal exercise. The coach finds himself with five men to teach instead of fifty. The harassed over-worked lecturer has plenty of time now for the piece of research work he has dreamt of in vain for so long, but somehow he has little heart for fourth-century manuscripts or Egyptian vases whilst the men who used to yawn so frequently and scribble unintelligible notes at his lectures are up to their waists in water in the trenches or reddening the soil of Belgium with their blood. So, though he is long past the magic age '18 to 40,' he also doffs cap and gown and puts on khaki, and the afternoon finds him forming fours on the 'Varsity Rugger ground, or painfully doing a route march round Madingley and Coton.

In the spring and summer of 1914 there was no hint in Cambridge of the coming tragedy. Term was as full as ever of intellectual and political discussions, of meetings of college societies to debate on disarmament or the Irish question, on Socialism or the Futurists.

In the women's colleges as in the men's we imagined that our joyful student life, full of books and games and *camaraderie*, would go on unchecked year after year, with ever-growing numbers of fresh students coming up each October and fresh honours gained each June.

There was an utter disbelief in the imminent possibility of war. Even the army manœuvres of 1912, which took place in Cambridge and its neighbourhood, created no thrill, except that of amused interest, in peaceful minds. All Cambridge turned out to gaze at the little army of 80,000 men, which then seemed incredibly large, and followed them in motor-cars or on bicycles along dusty roads and through winding village streets to see the final encounter of the attacking and defending troops.

Yet that small force was the nucleus of the original B.E.F. There were regiments bivouacing then in Cambridge streets which had come straight from the North-West Frontier of India, and which contained men who had fought in previous wars against the Boer and the Pathan. Some of the young officers even then had made a shrewd guess that an European war was coming. With the troops were military attachés, German and Austrian among others, and perhaps it was then that the Germans convinced themselves that ours was a 'contemptible little army.' They saw the limited scale of our manœuvres. They heard half-a-dozen aeroplanes droning over the quiet Cambridgeshire country, and they probably smiled at our one or two tiny 'dirigibles'. As for the guns, field artillery of the lightest, our critics must have thought grimly of the surprises Essen had in store.

May Week, 1914, was as gay and brilliant as ever, and during the summer Cambridge settled

down into its usual Long Vacation state of half-suspended animation. Newnham was invaded by welcome throngs of University Extension students, who showed their usual eagerness to see and hear everything of interest in Cambridge. Up to the last week of that fateful July we never realized what was impending. When we read the newspapers of July 27 a vague fear began to form in our minds, and then quickly from day to day it gathered strength. It was on July 29, if I remember right, that I dispatched to Louvain the last set of proofs of a book which I was editing for the University Press there. Six days later the Germans had entered Belgium, and within a month Louvain was in flames.

The bewilderment and conflict of feeling of those first months of war will always remain a vivid memory in our minds. War was so alien to all our experience that for a while our thinking powers were numbed into uselessness. Fortunately action remained open to us, and for us women, who had to stand by while our brothers went to fight, V.A.D. work proved the greatest possible boon. More far-seeing than the remainder of the nation, the British Red Cross Society and St. John Ambulance Brigade had formed county associations some years earlier in order to establish a net-work of Voluntary Aid Detachments all over the country, and had held courses of lectures in First Aid and Home Nursing during the previous winters. Those of us who had attended these classes formed a nucleus who were

ready to offer for further training and for any such immediate service of a simple kind as might be within our power. Nobody guessed then how great would be the demand on all the resources of the British Red Cross Society, nor how splendidly the generosity of the nation would respond to the call to supply comforts for our wounded. Honour is surely due to the wise leadership of our Founders and Presidents, who in the face of great difficulties planned the first small beginnings of a work which has grown to such mighty proportions.

La Brabançonne.

The First Borough Red Cross Hospital, Cambridge, was opened on November 2, 1914, for wounded Belgian soldiers. It was the time of the first Battle of Ypres, and Antwerp had only lately fallen. England was full of Belgian refugees and wounded from the hospitals of Antwerp, while our English military hospitals, then far fewer in number than at present, were full to overflowing with our own wounded from Flanders. Two of the Cambridge Women's Voluntary Aid Detachments (Cambs. 8 and 28) were asked to open an auxiliary hospital for Belgians at once, and three large empty houses in Cintra Terrace were placed at their disposal.

Great was the excitement among all of us, who had been practising diligently since the outbreak of war. We had been to courses of lectures, and had been allowed to go and learn a little of the practical side of hospital work at Addenbrooke's Hospital and the Infirmary. Now, however, we were to have a small hospital of our own, and we set to work with redoubled energy to sweep and scrub the three houses and make them habitable for our patients. Then we drove round Cambridge in a motor lorry, collecting the furniture which had been promised to the Red Cross Society. We did this successfully for two days, but on the third the van was late in appearing, so the Commandant and I wheeled a handcart through

some of the less frequented streets, and collected mattresses, coal-scuttles, glasses, dish-cloths, etc.

When the beds had all been set up and the rooms arranged, a first instalment of patients arrived. They proved a fine lot of men, very patient and cheerful and ready to be entertained. Only one or two of them had to be kept in bed ; the rest were able to walk about and come daily to the surgery to have their wounds dressed by us under the supervision of Sister Matthews, our trained nurse, who was a tower of strength to us all. We took turns at different duties ; for example, I was surgery orderly at first, and it was my business to get the dressings and bowls of disinfectant ready, to sterilise the instruments and hand them to the doctor or dresser, to keep a supply of boiling and also cold sterile water always ready, and to wash up and scrub the floor at the end of the morning. My next week was spent as house orderly, which was not nearly as exciting, but taught me several useful new accomplishments, such as the correct way of blacking a grate and of keeping water bottles bright. Presently I had a turn in the ward where the patients who had to stay in bed or were too crippled to walk were kept. This proved extremely interesting, as it gave me a chance to know a few patients well. There were only four of them at that time—Joseph, Jean, François, and Guillaume.[1]

[1] We called them by their surnames, which I prefer not to give here.

Joseph came from Charleroi, had fought during August and September, and was injured in the Antwerp trenches by the bursting of a shell near by. He was bruised all over, internally and externally, and his legs and back were injured. He came to us in our first batch of patients, and stayed with us for nearly two months, so we took a special interest in him. We all liked him ; he was older than the others and very sensible—except on the occasion when a bottle of stout, which had been brought him by a friend, was confiscated, after which he expressed a desire to go to a rich comrade in France, who would let him drink as much stout as he liked, to recover his strength. On the Tuesday after Christmas there was a great stir in the hospital. Joseph's wife had arrived from Belgium ! He had written to her some time before, but had hardly dared to hope that the letter would reach her. It had, however, been smuggled through, and on receiving it she packed up a few things in a bundle, left her little boy with friends, and after some delay at Antwerp, succeeded in getting through to England. We decided at once to send the couple to a village near, where they could live together in one of the cottages provided for refugees, whilst Joseph still received medical treatment.

Jean, who also came from Charleroi, had formerly been a miner. He had fought for some time, and was wounded in the knee, which had now become very stiff and painful with rheumatism. He was a very nice man, dark and quiet,

and pined a good deal for news of his home. Once when I rallied them all in the ward on their dismal appearance one morning, he said to me, " It is hard not to be sad when one has had no news since August." I found that he had a wife, and a little girl of eight called Auguste, whose photo he showed to one of the nurses. Again, one Sunday morning the band of a Territorial regiment was playing very stirringly in the street before church parade. My men looked so excited and eager at the sound, but a few minutes later Jean said to me, " En Angleterre on joue de la musique, mais en Belgique on pleure." They were the saddest words I ever heard in the hospital.

François was the liveliest in the ward. He had not fought for so long as the others, and he had heard that his wife was safe. He was often in high spirits, joking and teasing the others.

The youngest of the four was Guillaume, aged twenty-one, and looking younger still. He was the baby of the party in every way, and we all spoilt him in consequence. He was rather good-looking, with curly hair which he combed carefully every morning, and he took an interest in his personal appearance which never quite deserted him, even on his gloomiest days. He was also delightfully clean, and had a passion for washing in cold water. When he first came to us he was suffering from a wound in the foot, which healed quite quickly. He had also been wounded by shrapnel in the other foot, and told us that he

had to march five days with the wounds all open. It was, however, chiefly a case of shell shock, and long after his wounds were healed he suffered greatly from deafness and nerve trouble.

At first he was very miserable, and inclined to be sullen and give trouble. One night when he had to be given an injection, he screamed and shrieked so that he could be heard all over the house, and Sister had to administer it while four of the V.A.D.'s held him down. The other men told us that he would lie in bed and cry, and his deafness was a barrier cutting him off from the life around him. Some people thought as his illness was largely a matter of nerves, he should be treated without much sympathy, but most of us were won over by his youth and petted him considerably. François delighted in teasing and plaguing him, and would say when rebuked "Guillaume a l'air d'être prêt a pleurer," but Guillaume generally took it in very good part and would give one of his slow delightful smiles, which we were all anxious to win from him And anyhow a cure was effected. He improved slowly at first, then very rapidly, and when I last saw hm he was careering about on a bicycle, still a little lame, but full of life and spirits.

On Christmas Day we had a Christmas tree for the men. It delighted them highly when they saw it in its glory, laden with presents and glistening with tinsel and spangles. Each man received three presents, two off the tree and one from a pile of woollen comforts. There was much

shouting and singing, we had the Brabançonne, Marseillaise, and our own National Anthem, and there were speeches from the Belgian Chaplain and from Mr. Mirrlees, the director of our house. Joseph and Guillaume, who had then only half recovered, were carried upstairs to share in the fun. Guillaume was resplendent in a white woollen waistcoat which had been given him by ——. He was immensely proud of it, and smiling at us, patted himself and said " English gentleman, English gentleman ! '

To all of us who worked at the hospital the sight of those tall houses, now empty, brings back many random reminiscences of pleasant work on our part, and of comradeship and generosity among the men. There was the zeal in bandage-winding of Sergeant L. disfigured by a terrible wound in his jaw. There was the sticky paper-bag of sweets which Joseph produced from his dressing gown pocket and offered to the nurses before he and the other men had any themselves There was the old peasant who had been looking after his pigs right in the midst of the fighting, and would not leave off when warned. When he was hit the Belgian soldiers told him it was his own fault for not getting out of the way, to which he replied in Flemish, " Not at all, it was your fault for fighting there." There was the man who went back to the front after four operations saying, "One bullet very good, I like one bullet. Three four bullets I do not like. Four operations I do not like."

Their English never became very fluent, as was shown by the note sent to the housekeeper to ask for ink. " In the salon we are not ink. Will you on this man give a few inks ? " Or, again, there was the man who was reproved for coming late to the surgery for his evening fomentation. He excused himself volubly in French, saying that he had been out to tea and did not notice how late it was till he looked at the clock, and then he hurried off and made such haste that he dropped his crutch and stumbled, but still he hurried along. Finding that his pathetic description of his haste did not make much impression, he determined to try English. With a final effort he brought out the words, explained by his heated brow, " I *sweet.*"

One day I took up to London a party of Belgian wounded who had been discharged from hospital Some of the men came from Cambridge, and some from the Red Cross Hospital at Linton. I felt curiously like a hen with her chickens as we walked up to the station, one patient marching in front with me, whilst the eight others walked behind with their little bundles. In the train we had a long conversation, and one man who was going back to the front showed himself particularly intelligent and entertaining. He had fought at Louvain, Malines, Antwerp, and the Yser, and on one occasion a shell had burst near him, knocked him down and buried him in earth, but did not hurt him at all though it killed three of his companions. Out of his company of 280,

only 50 remained, so he considered himself very lucky, and when another man remarked that in spite of all he had been wounded at last, he merely answered that he had missed the bad winter weather since he had been wounded at the beginning of November, and now it was March.

At Liverpool Street we were met by an official of the Belgian Committee, to whom I handed over all the men, except one who was invalided out of the army and was going into Kent to meet his mother. His train started from Cannon Street, so I walked with him to the station, he carrying his two little bags. He was a very silent youth, at which I was not surprised, as the Linton Commandant had already told me his story. He came from Aerschot, and eight of his family had been killed by the Germans. His father, brother, uncle and cousins were stood up in a row and shot down. All of them were killed except his little brother of sixteen, who, though wounded in the face, lay still and pretended to be dead. When the soldiers had moved off, he crawled away and hid in a drain-pipe, where he stayed for a few days, coming out at night to get food from his mother, who had been obliged to bury her husband and brothers. At last he and the mother and sister escaped to England, and this soldier was now going to join them.

Towards the spring, when the supply of Belgian wounded was almost at an end, some British soldiers arrived from the Base Hospital to fill up vacant places. They had been with us

only a few days when news came that the V.C. had been awarded to one of them, Private Robson, of the Royal Scots. There was great rejoicing, and we hurriedly got up a concert and feast that same evening. We prepared huge basins of fruit salad, and bought chocolates and crackers, and altogether we had a great time. Everyone enjoyed it hugely except the unlucky Robson, who was very shy and diffident, and hated having a fuss made over him—indeed, he told me it was much worse than the fighting. Some of our V.A.D. members sang, and various Englishmen and Belgians had been induced to come and help. The Belgians were specially keen on a song with the chorus " Quack, quack " at the end of every line, and a perfect orgy of quacks at the end of every verse. Then we had the inevitable " Tipperary," which by this time [March, 1915] was losing favour with our own troops, but had been delightedly adopted by the Belgians. It was played on the violin by a little boy who had begged to be allowed to come, as he wanted so much to see a real V.C., and Belgians and British alike joined in the chorus with great fervour. During the interval for the fruit salad our director made a little speech and presented Robson with a gold pencil-case. Poor boy, he was quite overpowered by the cheers he received. He was very quiet, small, and unheroic-looking, and we never got any information from him about his exploits, but from the newspapers we learnt that he had shown ' most distinguished

bravery' in rescuing his N.C.O. under heavy fire, and then going out again to rescue another wounded man, in which second attempt he was himself wounded in the hand and thigh. The one thing that seemed to please him among the congratulations he received was a letter from his old school-master at South Shields, and he showed it to us one day in the surgery with some pride.

In March, 1915, it was decided to close the hospital temporarily, as the Belgian wounded were no longer being brought over to England, and the pressure on the base hospital was not so great. We were all very desolated at shutting up the place, though we had the hope of re-opening again soon for British soldiers in another part of the town.[1] We had found our patients so friendly and cheerful that we were sad at parting with them. As the Quartermaster remarked at the farewell tea which we gave the men, "We shall never think of Belgians and Frenchmen as foreigners any more. We shall feel we know all about them."

This farewell tea was a great success. We gave it to our Belgians at one of the cafés in the town, and the convalescents who had already left us and were boarded out in Cambridge, such as François and Guillaume, were invited too. We feasted in the usual hearty style, and then sang

[1] During the summer of 1915 the 1st Borough Red Cross Hospital was re-opened in three divisions at St. Chad's, Wordsworth Grove, and Huntley House.

La Brabançonne, God Save the King, The Marseillaise, and Tipperary—all played by one of the wounded soldiers. Then came speeches in English, French, and Flemish, and Demestre [one of the men] made a very nice little English speech, saying how kind everyone in Cambridge had been to the Belgians, and that he could say from his own experience that at the First Borough Red Cross Hospital they had had " a jolly time." Another man, who had lost his left arm, stood up at the tea-table and launched into a difficult French song, which he sang extremely well without any accompaniment. The festivities might have kept on for hours, had it not been for the appearance of the motor car which was to take back the cripples to the hospital. One of the things which endeared our Belgians to us was their extraordinary faculty for being cheerful and making a joyful noise in spite of all their wounds and misfortunes.

After our men went away we had many letters from them full of gratitude, written in appalling French, but very pleasant to read nevertheless. " Jamais je n'oublierez "—with a cheerful confusion of all the personal endings—seemed the prevailing sentiment. One day I had a delightful letter from Guillaume thanking me for the snapshots of himself and François which I had sent him. It began, " Chere et Devouée Sœur," and continued, after a formal expression of thanks, " Qu'ont je reviendrez Chez mes parents en Belgique je serez fier de mes photographies

comme vous dite, et surtout des bons soins que nous autres Soldat belge avons s'u en angletterre ; et la ville de Cambridge restera longtemps dans m'a mémoire."

Another member of our detachment had an even nicer letter from a Flemish boy, who was sent to a village some miles from Cambridge :

" Je vous ecrit ses quelque mots pour vous dire que je suis tres triste d'etre quites le college [the Belgians called the hospital *le college* because it was the former site of Cheshunt College, and the name remained outside] surtout que j'aimai beaucoup les soeur et elle etait si gentil avec moi.

Mais j'espere que jour ou vous aurez le temp vous viendron nous voir car le temps nous semble lan. . .

Et aussi cher soeur ici on ne sait plus aller à l'opital ni au cinema ni au the comme an college ici on fait la chasse au lievre.

Recevez Cher sœur mes sincere amitie.

S ——.

So we parted. But still sometimes I seem to hear the noisy clatter of the crutches on the stairs, and the tramp of heavy feet, and the cheerful men's voices raised in the chorus of La Brabançonne :

Le roi, la loi, la liberté.

Groves of Academe.

"Oh, Nurse, it's like 'eaven!" was the verdict of some of our men when they first came to the new quarters in which our hospital is installed. Certainly it is a very pleasant place, with big airy rooms with cool green curtains at the casement windows, and green bedspreads with a large white pattern, and white paint kept scrupulously clean. There is a mess-room with long tables and comfortable wicker chairs, and it has large French windows which open straight on to the lawn, bordered on two sides by shady trees.

This garden is a great boon. It is not large enough for tennis or cricket, but the men play croquet in it all day long. Men on crutches or with one arm disabled find croquet a very suitable game, as it does not require any violent exertion, and they become amazingly skilful at it. Our ground is very uneven, providing many pitfalls for new-comers, but the old hands know exactly how much to allow at each hoop for the roll of the ball, and when the nurses take a turn at the game they are coached all the time by their patients. Sometimes one of the college playing-fields is lent to us for the day, and then a cricket match is arranged, and prodigies of valour are performed by one-armed batsmen and cripples who have to get other men to run

for them. Our men don't seem to worry about their disabilities at all. They accept the handicap of the loss of an arm or leg as part of the fortune of war, and just make the best of it.

The First Borough Red Cross Hospital is now lodged in three separate houses, each run by one of the Cambridge Women's Detachments. They are all near the famous ' Backs ' and close to one or other of the colleges, and there is a certain family likeness about them, though each has its own distinctive features. Much of the work is done by the wives and daughters of college dons and by women lecturers from Newnham. Our own particular house is in a by-road called Wordsworth Grove, and there is an academic flavour about the whole neighbourhood, whch does not, however, seem to daunt the Tommies at all, and they take most kindly to their new surroundings. They are within easy reach, too, of the great base hospital from which most of them have come to us, and they can go there daily for special treatment if required.

Soon after our hospital was re-opened we had a wedding. Not one of the sort beloved by novelists and newspaper correspondents in which a nurse marries a patient,[1] but one in which the whole detachment took a great interest, nevertheless. The bridegroom was a patient

[1] I believe these weddings are much rarer than many people imagine. I have met a great many nurses during two years of Red Cross work in England and France, but know personally of only two such cases. The bride was in one case a trained nurse and in the other a V.A.D.

who had been recommended for the D.C.M. He had been engaged for some time to a girl in his own village, and now they thought it a good opportunity to get married. The wedding took place from our hospital. There was a guard of honour from among the patients, who formed an arch at the church door with their sticks ; the hospital staff attended the service in full force ; there was a wedding breakfast afterwards at the hospital, and speeches were made by the Commandant and others.

As winter began to draw on, there had to be a change in the men's recreations. Football took the place of cricket, and matches were arranged with the other houses forming the hospital or with outside teams. One night there was a fancy dress competition for the patients, at which the prizewinners represented a Red Indian, a Cavalier, and a Red Cross nurse. The last-mentioned was, as one of the V.A.D.s remarked in a letter to a friend, " a horrible warning to us. He was *so like*, and so appalling, and rushed round with an alarm clock taking pulses."

The " Wordsworth Grove Magazine " was started by one of our patients, and flourished greatly for some time. It appeared monthly, and contained excellent cartoons of the Commandant, the Medical Officer, and so on—its first editor was an H.A.C. man who had been a black-and-white artist before the war—as well as articles grave and gay, poems, and prize competitions. Here are two verses from the first number ; the one

aimed at the nursing staff, the other at refractory patients :—

" WOMAN. . .
When pain and anguish wring the brow,
A ministering angel thou."
We feel the man who wrote this passage
Had never suffered much from massage.

* * *

In the list of the King's Birthday Honours we see
The names of great men who have gained the C.B.
Some qualified heroes they're certainly missed
By not sending here for the Commandant's list.

Much more could I tell, but time fails me. I can't help recording, however, a dialogue between two of our patients which illustrates the British idea of ' frightfulness ' as opposed to the German. I was bathing the foot of a man who had already spent a year in different military hospitals and had suffered eight operations. " Ah, nurse," he remarked, " when the war's over and I get back to civvy life, if I find a German comes over and gets my job, won't I punch 'is 'ead for 'im ! " A sergeant who was sitting in the room was determined to outdo this threat. " Yes," he put in, " that's right. I'll knock 'im with my boot. I'll make my little boy throw a potato at 'im ! "

Winter in a Camp Hospital in France.

It is often difficult to realise that we are in France,[1] though we are in a strange country that certainly is not England. One may go from morning to night without hearing a single word of French—except the strange jargon that passes for that tongue with our men. We are within sight of the sea, and, though I have not heard the guns myself, the bombardment before Loos was audible here. To my mind it is a glorious place. In front are miles of sand dunes, blown by the wind into all sorts of fantastic shapes, and bright at this time of the year with orange-coloured buckthorn-berries. Here and there stand clumps of dark fir-trees, and beyond these lie stretches of yellow sand reaching to the sea—not here of the deep, vivid hue of the Mediterranean, but the softer blue-green, flecked with white, that we know on the southern shores of England. Behind the hospital camp in which we live rise rolling chalk hills, bare enough now in winter, though in summer they must be covered with thyme and

1. This chapter was written in November, 1915, soon after I had been sent to Camiers to work as a V.A.D. member in a military hospital under the War Office. It is permissable for once to mention a place name, as the hospital was removed in December, 1915, to another locality.

wild flowers. The sea-winds are always blowing to chase away the germs, but as they threaten to blow away the camp as well it is rumoured that we are soon to move to other quarters.

November does not strike one as an ideal month in which to begin life under canvas if one is not already used to it. When we first arrived here the rain was coming down fast and the camp was a sea of mud. We were given a large tent for the night, and as our camp-kit and heavy luggage had not yet arrived, we were provided with bedsteads, mattresses, and army blankets. The mattresses were wet with rain, and the prospect of sleeping without sheets or pillows did not arouse much enthusiasm. Our only illumination was a candle-lantern, and there was only one washstand between the four of us. I dried my mattress over a little oilstove (reft from us the next day), and, sleeping in nearly all my clothes, kept warm and dry.

Our first few days were very rainy, and our clothes and boots, which we had to clean ourselves, became covered with mud. It is the custom here for nurses to wear large gumboots reaching almost to their knees, oilskins, and sou'-westers over their uniform ; this costume was sometimes necessary even in the wards, some of which leaked terribly. One night a tremendous wind arose and blew down two of our bell-tents ; some of the nurses had consequently to sleep in the bathroom. The gale continued for about

thirty-six hours, and the patients in those of the tent-wards which threatened to blow away first had to be carried into the stronger tents or into the operating theatre. A few days later we were snowed up, and it was difficult to creep out of the tent without allowing a heavy mass of snow to fall in and overwhelm everything.

This may sound unpleasant, but I am having a great time. Food is good and abundant, the air is extraordinarily bracing, and the work is not too heavy. The trained nurses have been very good to us, and I like some of the other V.A.D.s immensely. The outdoor life keeps us amazingly healthy, in spite of the mud and rain. Rumour has it that six of our M.O.'s have been obliged to leave on account of sickness ; but then, as Sister X. remarked to me the other day, ' If the sisters couldn't stand more than the doctors do there wouldn't be many of us left.' The M.O. who came into the ward and grumbled bitterly because he had been roused by mistake at 6.30 a.m. did not receive much sympathy from women who have to get up every morning—Sundays as well as weekdays—at that early hour, and whose working day goes on till 8.0 p.m. ' The nurses must have good constitutions ' is the Colonel's verdict, and certainly most of us look plump and robust enough.

We are a self-contained little community, with our bully beef and English bread, our strong tea, our breakfasts of porridge and bacon. It is only when we wander into the tiny hamlet outside or

the fishing village a few miles off that we see the France we used to know—the France of gabled houses and green shutters, of peasant women with shawls over their heads, short skirts and blue aprons, with their weather-beaten faces and clear, courageous eyes. Even there the ubiquitous British soldier makes his presence felt. I walked into a cottage the other day where a Frenchwoman who undertakes sewing had promised to alter my coat. It was a typical French living-room, with little French urchins clambering round. Seeing a man, whom I took to be the husband, in the corner with his coat off, I turned to him with a commonplace remark in French about the weather. He looked blankly at me, and muttered something that sounded familiar. 'Why, you speak English, don't you?' said my companion to him, and he answered with laugh, 'I guess so! I'm a Canadian.' He was thoroughly at home in the cottage, playing with the children, and teaching little Jean, aged three, to salute and to say, 'Good-night, Sister.' The father of the family appeared in a moment, and was evidently on the best of terms with the Canadian, who somehow managed to make himself understood by everybody, as do the English soldiers in a language compiled by themselves. 'Sister will you give me a ver of water?' was the request of one lad. '*We, we*, as they say out here,' wrote back another to his friend in England. *Savez-vous* and *compris* are the chief stock-in-trade of most Tommies, though an

officer told me that his men had accomplished wonders with '*Allemongs no bong.*'

On half-days we go farther afield, and walk four or five miles to a place where we can take the tram to a seaside place, beloved of the fashionable world in normal times. From its wide, deserted promenade one can watch the glory of the setting sun over the sea ; and its jewellers' shops, its *cafés*, and hairdressers are the Mecca of the V.A.D. who has been living in the wilds of camp. Convalescent officers, Army sisters, Canadian nurses, in their bright blue-linen dresses and brass-buttoned coats, throng to the sign of ' The Blue Cat ' to drink tea and eat fancy cakes, and imagine themselves in Paris or London. There we feel ourselves in touch once more with civilisation—a necessary reminder, for in camp one falls back uncommonly quickly into barbarism. In this cold weather I have come to sympathise considerably with the girl who said she made her bed only once a week, as it felt so cold after she had made it ; and on the morning when the camp was deep in snow, and we found there was no water inside the tent, my companion and I joined (only temporarily) the ranks of the Great Unwashed.

Yet most of us find camp life decidedly congenial. Of course, there are many and obvious drawbacks about it, especially when rain beats in through the flap of the tent, and one has to get up and go to bed by the light of a flickering candle lantern. When I caught my foot in a tent

rope, just when the snow had melted, and fell headlong into the mire, splashing my only big coat from head to foot, I did not bless the Authorities whose wisdom keeps us here ; and when the rat we had chased out earlier in the evening came back and waked us by running round the tent and nibbling at our apples, I felt doubtful about the advantages of camp life. There are more serious disadvantages, too. One wet and windy night, about three o'clock, a tent threatened to blow down. One V.A.D. hastily put on her great-coat and ran for help to the orderlies' quarters. The other clung to the tent-pole, to steady it, but before help could come the tent had fallen, and the orderlies had to dig her out from under a mass of canvas, bedding, chairs, boxes, and so on. She was bruised all down one side, and all her own and her friend's belongings were so thick with mud and soaked with rain as to be almost useless. It was six o'clock that evening before either of them had clothes dry enough to wear. These, however, are exceptional incidents, and there are very real compensations : the healthiness of an outdoor life, the spirit of friendliness and comradeship, the freedom from the numberless restrictions which sometimes make hospital life in England so irksome to college or business girls. Here one makes friends quickly ; the barriers between juniors and seniors are easily broken down, and the life is not favourable to the creation of petty regulations. I have heard of hospitals at home where a probationer

may not ask a staff nurse to pass the jam. Out here these points of etiquette are forgotten, and Sisters, Staff nurses, and V.A.D.s generally fraternise very happily.

Our daily routine, of course, is that of a military hospital. We rise at 6.30 a.m., breakfast at 7 a.m. and work till 8 p.m., with three hours off duty—from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m., or from 5 p.m. onwards. Rigid punctuality at meals is naturally not exacted at a camp where the mess-tent is some distance from the wards and from the sisters' quarters. Food is good and abundant ; our hospital in particular prides itself on the excellence of its mess. Most of us go to bed about nine o'clock, and sleep well till the morning. There are few opportunities here for evening dissipation, but once or twice a week some enterprising people get up a concert in the Y.M.C.A. hut, and on rare occasions Princess Victoria's concert party visits the camp on its tour of the British hospitals in France, and gives staff and patients the delight of hearing good music adequately rendered once more.

Among the amenities I must not forget to mention the Nurses' Rest Club. This is lodged in a house which formerly belonged to an artist, and is run by two English ladies, to whom I would like to tender my sincerest thanks. No one who has not lived in a tent during November in Northern France can understand how much it means to take refuge under a roof, beside a blazing fire in a cosy room furnished with basket-chairs

and writing-tables, and there at one's ease read novels, write letters, dry one's wet boots, and eat a dainty tea with one's friends.

Our patients (who are all British) are far less noisily cheerful than the wounded soldiers I helped to nurse at the First Borough Red Cross Hospital at Cambridge. Poor dears! they are so home-sick for 'Blighty,' and some of them are afraid they will never see it again. Unlike our wounded at home, they talk over their experiences at the Front again and again. Their recollections of life in the trenches are very sombre—a horror for which they can find no adequate words. Mud and dirt, hunger, weariness, monotony broken only by the roar of the guns with their accompaniment of blood and wounds and death—this is the glory of war as these men have seen it. Yet they still have their jests and their stories, and their patience and gratitude are things to wonder at. Some of the wounds are terrible. I helped the other day to dress the foot of a boy of eighteen who is on the D.I. [dangerously ill] list. Half the foot was blown away by a bomb, but he ran for miles, so the Sister told me, on the shattered part remaining. The doctors were very anxious to save his heel, as it would keep him from becoming a cripple, so he had had three operations and was about to undergo a fourth. On the other hand, some of the men are only slightly injured, and are ready to be sent to a convalescent camp and then back to the Front.

Tragedy touches not only the patients, but the staff as well at times. The Sister of my ward lost her favourite brother a few weeks ago at the Dardanelles. Yet she is as plucky and cheerful as ever, and makes us all laugh, as we crowd round the charcoal brasier, with her tales of the discomforts she endured, in the early days of the war, in a train which took four days to go from Saint Nazaire to Boulogne. The husband of one V.A.D. is at the front, and most of us have brothers, or some one near and dear to us, in the trenches or on the seas.

There are startling incidents, too, sometimes. Some while before my arrival, two of the V.A.D.s passed two M.O.s on their way to the shore. The officers saluted, and the girls took no further notice of them, till turning round they saw one man beckoning, as he bent over a khaki object that looked like his coat. The thing on the ground was the other officer ; one girl took off her coat and put it over him, while the other went for the ambulance, but before help could come, he was dead—of heart failure. The last words he had said as they climbed the dunes were : '*I wonder if we can see Blighty from here!*' He lies now in the little cemetery by the fishing village near, with his fellows whose faces are turned, not here towards the east, but westwards to home and England, as they wait in sure and certain hope of the resurrection of the dead.

Life here is not gloomy, but a vivid thing, in this buoyant sea air, with days of brilliant sun-

shine and cloudless sky, alternating with those of wind and rain. On Monday the snowy hills glittered as though they had been the Alps, and when the sun set, the orange light over sea and shore, on dark fir-trees and yellow sand dunes, where the snow lay still in the hollows, was more wonderful than words can tell. And when night came, the camp lay bathed in whitest moonlight, while the stars kept watch above. And brighter than stars or sun are the courage and faith and patience that dwell in the hearts of our men, who, having made the great surrender, face pain and weariness with a constant smile and jest. Humour is here in abundance, but it is hardly of a kind that I can write down for you—so much of it depends on the atmosphere of the place, the quickness of the repartee, and the broad Scotch or cockney in which it is delivered.

I have been writing most of this in a tent, with a perfect babel of sounds floating in from outside. Our camp, having been justly condemned at last by the authorities as too exposed for winter, is to be abandoned, and we are to wander elsewhere. Some talk of Serbia or Salonica, others of Egypt or Marseilles, as our destination. Maybe we shall even find ourselves back in England. Time will show.

On Night Duty.

Just after I had written home a long account of our life in a hospital camp, our marching orders arrived. The Powers that Be (represented in our case by officials whose identity is veiled under the mysterious initials of A.D.M.S., D.D.M.S., etc.) decided at last that the site was too exposed for a winter hospital, so our patients were sent to England or to other hospitals out here, our equipment was packed up, and the staff was divided into a number of small groups, some of which were sent to one place, some to another.

We four V.A.D.s who came from England together had the good luck to be all sent to the same hospital. We were given less than twenty-four hours' notice to pack up, so there was not much time for good-byes. We left the camp on a glorious winter morning of sharp frost and bright sunshine. There had been a light snowfall during the night, and the hillside was covered with a thin white glittering veil. We were told to take nothing with us but warm coats, as our luggage would arrive before us by motor ambulance. Alas for the vanity of human hopes! On the way we passed the lorry in the ditch by the side of the road. It had skidded while descending a steep hill, and trunks and suit-cases lay scattered around it in the snow. We hoped against hope

all day long for its arrival, and at night we were forced to borrow sleeping clothes from the Sisters and V.A.D.s at our new hospital. Never again will I allow myself to be beguiled by the specious promises of R.A.M.C. orderlies into parting from my trusty suit-case.

Arrived at our destination we found ourselves in absolutely different surroundings from those we had just left. There we had been in the wilds, our nearest shops (and those very poor ones) five miles away. Here we are in a large French town, well known to all English people, with excellent shops, a good service of tramways, plenty of picture palaces and other places of amusement. We are billeted in an hotel, where we can have electric light and fires in our bedrooms. Yet I must confess that at first we hankered after the freedom of our camp life, and for some nights we looked shiveringly at the clean white sheets provided for us and slept instead in our warm sleeping bags till a sudden change in the weather forced us to discard them.

Our life here is much more like that of V.A.D. members in military hospitals at home. Gone are our sou-westers and gum boots ; in their place we wear strictly regulation uniform, and no mufti is allowed. Our hospital occupies a large hotel a few minutes walk from our billets. I work in a medical ward, or rather a collection of small wards all on the same floor. We nurse cases of pleurisy, pneumonia, influenza, bronchitis, nephritis, gastritis, enteritis, and almost

every other *itis* under the sun. Some of them are from the trenches, others are ' local sick ' from the camps near by. It is less interesting than surgical work, but at this time of the year, when there is little fighting and the weather conditions are bad, the medical wards become the chief concern of a hospital. A V.A.D.'s share is to make beds, clean and tidy lockers, wash and feed helpless patients, scrub tables and cupboards, take temperatures, and occasionally note pulses and respirations, and generally make herself useful to the sister in charge. Most of the heavy and disagreeable duties are done by the R.A.M.C. orderlies, and though we are kept busy we are not really overworked.

The spirit of the ' local sick ' is distinctly less high than that of the men from the trenches. Those who have suffered least are the most ready to grumble at the privations and restrictions of hospital life. But the patients who really annoy us are the men from the leave boat, who, having eaten and drunk more than was good for them all the days they were on leave, end by being terribly sea-sick on the voyage and are brought in as suffering from ' gastritis,' while they hug empty whisky bottles in their coat pockets. These, however, are not numerous, and the gratitude of the serious cases, the pneumonias, pleurisies, and so on, amply repays us for everything. I saw a very pretty scene in our ward the other day. We had a very nice man on the D.I. list with acute pneumonia. His wife was sent for,

but by the time she arrived the crisis was past, and he was well on the way to recovery. She was a tall slim woman with dark hair and a bright colour, and she brought with her the eight months old baby, who had borne the Channel crossing without causing the slightest trouble. She bent over her husband, holding out the baby to him, and it crowed and chortled and gurgled with joy. To see the three of them together was one of the many things that make nursing worth while.

At present I am on night duty, and am really enjoying myself. I sleep like a top in the day, and rise refreshed at 7 p.m. ready for dinner at 7.30 and duty at 8. (I am writing this in my bunk about two o'clock in the morning, with half an ear attentive to catch any specially loud cough or moan of ' Oh dear, oh dear ! ') Looking after 54 patients and an orderly who is a Scotchman with a very fiery temper, is much more fun than washing up gargle mugs and cleaning cupboards. I am in semi-charge of the division, which contains eleven small wards with fifty-five beds. There is a sister who is responsible for the whole floor, but as she has also fifty-five beds at her end with no one but an orderly to help her, she has not much time to spend on mine. It is very jolly to feel that I am allowed to fill the place of a trained nurse. Such a lot of them have gone away from here to other hospitals.

Except on the nights when we receive a convoy of fresh patients, there is not very much work till

four o'clock in the morning. When I come on duty I go round and say good-night, and supply hot drinks to those who want them. About 9.30 I make tea for Sister and myself, and then settle down to read or write letters. I keep an eye on any patients who may be on the D.I. list, and give cough medicine to those whose coughs are specially troublesome. At midnight the V.A.D.s go down to an orgy of tea, hot buttered toast, and eggs or ham or chops. This is the most festive hour of the night, and we linger over the meal a little and warm ouselves at the blazing fire. From one to two o'clock is the Sisters' supper hour, during which I am in charge of the whole floor with its hundred and ten beds. The responsibility is not a very heavy one, however, as the Night Super always goes her round then, and gives advice as to the treatment of patients needing special attention. The slackest time of the night is from two to four o'clock and then I generally rest in my chair in anticipation of the strenuous hours to come. At 4 p.m. I make tea, and then the orderly and I set to work to wash the patients, take temperatures, make beds, give out medicines, and gargles, before the men's breakfast appears at 7.15 a.m.—after which I tidy up to be ready for the day nurses and go off duty at 8 a.m. This may not sound very heavy, but it takes time to make so many beds, however quick one may be at the job, and when there are thirty-five temperatures to take (perhaps with only two thermometers), and

twenty-nine doses of one medicine to administer as well as nine of another, there are not many spare moments before eight o'clock arrives.

Of course when there are cases at the point of death, the night's work is more trying. We had a very sad case the other night—a sergeant who was brought in during the day almost dead from broncho-pneumonia. Everything possible was done for him, but he lived only a few hours. Another patient who took up much more of our time was a boy who was with us for over a month, and had his twenty-first birthday in hospital a few days before his death. He was in Sister's ward, so I had the responsibility of looking after him only from 1 to 2 a.m., when I am in charge of the whole floor as she is downstairs at supper. It is a curious feeling to sit in the dead of night beside a man whose breath may stop at any moment, with a hundred other patients under one's care as well, but I did not feel as anxious as I should have expected. The Night Super, who pays me a visit once during the hour, is very capable and experienced, and out here one becomes so used to pain and sickness and death that one accepts them as part of the ordinary course of things.

There is one unfailing compensation about night duty that makes up for many disadvantages —for the precious daylight hours that have to be wasted in sleep, and for the long vigil that must be kept when the darkness invites repose. It is the morning walk that hospital regulations

wisely impose on the night nurse. To come out from the airless wards where one has watched through the long winter's night, to leave the atmosphere of carbolic, iodine, and morphia, and go out along the sea shore where the waves are breaking in a long white line of foam, where the gulls are crying and the wind is blowing fresh and the early morning sunbeams are dancing on the water—this is to realise, as never before, the wonder of a world made new. Out of darkness and weariness and storm comes every morning this miracle of light and colour. So perhaps out of the long night of war in which Europe is plunged at present, shall come at last the promise of a new and cleaner world.

June, 1916: A Lull.

Yet another move since I last wrote! It was decided that the hotel was not altogether satisfactory, and that the hospital should be moved to a healthier site. We V.A.D.s were appointed to various other hospitals—much to our sorrow, as we had grown to love old No. Z.—and I had the good luck to be sent to one of the most beautiful places in Northern France. We came here in the cold of a sunless February day, and weeks of rain and snow followed, but I shall not soon forget my first sight of the great cliffs that stand sentinel over the little bay, nor the thrill that passed through me at night when I saw the moon-lit waters with the deep shadows cast on them by the huge rocks hollowed by the waves into the most fantastic shapes. The pebbly beach is so steep that the tide never goes out far, and thus by day and night the waves plash on the stones beneath the windows of our quarters, from which we can see the fishermen with their nets, and the many coloured fishing boats drawn up on the shingle, some painted with black and yellow stripes like wasps, and others like butterflies, blue and white.

Now it is summer time, and we can lie on the cliffs and watch the sun dip down behind the broad expanse of sea. The turf is bright with

sea-pinks and with golden fingers-and-thumb, and in sheltered valleys the honey-suckle is out already, and great spikes of purple fox-glove are appearing on the hillside. Altogether it is a fit place for men to rest and recover from the strain of the trenches, and they appreciate to the full all that is done for them in hospital. " I never thought there was such comfort in France, Sister," said one of them, and " I could stay here easy for the duration " is a remark I have often heard.

The men are splendid patients, and they are often extraordinarily grateful for very little, especially if they come straight from the trenches. " Sister, it's good just to hear an Englishwoman speak, after all them chattering French women," said one man. When I had occasion to tell some new patients that they must keep their ward tidy, I thought they might feel worried by so many instructions, but they said at once, " Oh, Nurse, it makes it seem more 'ome-like. If we was at 'ome, the missus 'ud be telling us to wipe our boots and not make the place in a mess." " May you live long and marry a millionaire," was the parting good wish of a man to whom I had done little but give doses of cough mixture.

One catches fragments of many strange and interesting tales in the men's talks among themselves, but they are generally reticent about their own deeds, and there is no desire to ' show off ' in hospital. Once we had a little Cockney, who reminded me of a sparrow with his quick

bright eyes and cheerful ways, and he had been in hospital for some weeks before I discovered that he had captured a big German, and had been granted six days' special leave for it. I should never have heard anything of it had it not happened that one day I found him trying to mend a rat-eaten khaki overcoat with nothing but black cotton, and came to his rescue with khaki material and thread. A chance word started him on reminiscences, and as I patched the coat I heard how he had been out with another man one night between the lines on a listening post, and how he heard a faint sound, and turning round saw a big German just behind him. He sprang at the man's rifle, and the shock of the encounter brought them both to ground, the Englishman on top, but in the scuffle his own rifle went off, and for a minute everything seemed to give way under him. The other man had at first quite lost his head, but he now caught hold of the German and began to call out, " 'Old 'im tight, 'e's gettin' up, 'e's a bitin' of me ! " The German was a big man, ' a Prussian Reserve,' and as my little Cockney (who only came up to my shoulder) observed, " If 'e'd a got up, 'e could 'ave tossed me about like a shuttle-cock," so seeing that the man was getting on to his feet again, he made a final effort and succeeded in putting a shot into him. Then the others came running up, and taking the German prisoner, carried him off to the field ambulance and thence to hospital, where he is now

recovering. " I'm glad you didn't kill him," I remarked, and my little Cockney asnwered " I didn't want to 'ave done nuffin' to 'im, but if I 'adn't shot 'im, 'e'd 'ave done us both in."

One day I had a long talk with a sergeant who came out with the original B.E.F.—the " Old Contemptibles "—in August, 1914. When he started on his reminiscences nothing could stop him, and luckily for me the hospital was fairly empty at the time, so I was able to stay and listen to him. He gave us a vivid picture of the early days of the war. There was that first fight when the British took up position at Mons. He described to us the village at which he was stationed with the gasometer near by, and the trench dug by his regiment close to a row of houses. " No sooner was it dug, Sister, than we was ordered to advance several 'undred yards, in front of the railway. We dug ourselves in again, when bang ! two Jack Johnsons came along and took the top clean off them 'ouses, and down they fell, right on that first trench we'd dug. Lucky for us we wasn't in it ! That was the first time I'd seen them big shells, and it made us just begin to get some idea of what a big thing we was up against. Well, the Germans advanced just like a flock of sheep. We didn't fire till they was at close range "—he mentioned the number of yards, but I have forgotten it—" and then didn't we let go at 'em ! But fast as they went down, more came on. There were so many there was no stopping 'em. When they got within

fifty yards, we got the order to retire ' every man for 'imself.' My section retired an 'undred and fifty yards or so, then down we laid and fired again. The company officer sees us, and 'e says, " What are you doing there? If the rest of 'em can't get away for themselves, let 'em stop." So back we went, and oh, it were a sight! 'Ouses going clean up in the air, with children in 'em and all. After a bit I caught sight of the C.O. 'E says to me, " You stick to me, my man," and I did. 'Twas an 'ot quarter of an hour, that was. We ran for about a mile and an 'alf, and then we 'alted in a village and formed up. You never seed such a crowd, all mixed up—Worcesters, Gloucesters, everything! 'Undred and eighty of our battalion missing, and that was only the beginning."

I had never before heard so candid a description of the great retreat, which was so nearly a rout, but which was turned, by fine leadership and by the amazing discipline and endurance of that handful of ' old contemptibles,' into one of the most glorious things in the history of the British Army. I remembered how, a little earlier, the sergeant had commented adversely on our national habit of expecting impossibilities from the British soldier—" fancy setting eighty thousand men and a few toy cannon against all them 'undreds of thousands with their Jack Johnson's, 16-inch 'owitzers and all! "—and how the other men in the ward had agreed, and had related how even in March, 1915, we were

still fighting the German big guns with eighteen-pounders. All through those early days it was British flesh and blood against the iron of the German heavy artillery, and the memory of it is still bitter to the men who went through it all.

But to return to the sergeant's tale. He took us, breathless, through the Retreat—Maubeuge, the rearguard action of the Guards at Landrecies, La Fère, Soissons, and so back to the very gates of Paris. Then came the order to advance in single line with no supports, and the pursuit of the discomfited Germans. At one village his regiment took the enemy unawares, all drunk, dancing the tango and practising the goose-step. Some R.A.M.C. men, no fighters at all, of course, unarmed captured thirteen Germans with full equipment. "They brought 'em along, and the officer 'e looked at 'em, and 'Wot d'yer call these?' says 'e. 'Well, sir,' says one of the R.A.M.C. 'I s'pose they'd call 'emselves Germans!'" Then there was the episode in which the sergeant's platoon rounded up a number of the enemy. "We got into another village, and oh, we was 'ungry! The women brought us coffee to drink and the baker gave us 'ot rolls, and we was just starting to 'ave a good meal, when in comes an officer. 'Ere, you blokes,' says 'e, 'd'yer think this show 's a blooming picnic? D'yer know the Germans 'ave only been out of this place ten minutes? Wot's that up on the 'ill?' So out we went, and I took two men to find out 'ow the ground lay. There was what

you might call a grape garden all up the side of the 'ill, and I crawled up alone, but when I got near the top I took good care not to show my 'ead. There was some bushes near, and I put out my 'and and shook 'em, and bzzz—came a German bullet right through 'em. Well, I called the others, and up they came, and drew the Germans' fire till we knew pretty well where they was. Then we crawled back, and let 'em know down below, and one platoon came up on the right and one on the left, and we just caught 'em nicely. They put up a bit of a fight, but we captured twenty-three, and all the rest was killed or seriously wounded!"

It was at the Aisne that the sergeant himself was hit. A shell burst in the trench and blew it to bits, and he, hit by stray pieces in ribs and both legs lay just outside, between the lines. "I don't remember nothing about 'ow it 'appened, except just calling out 'Joe, Joe,' to my chum next me. 'E was a lance-corporal then, same as me. I lay there outside the trench till dusk. Then the Brigade Major comes along, and 'e calls out to know 'ow long I'd been there, and I says 'I don't know rightly, sir, but it's been an 'ell of a time.' So the stretcher-bearers came and carried me back, and then I was in 'orspital for weeks."

When at last he was fit for active service again, after sick leave and some time on light duty, he was sent out to Gallipoli, where his regiment was now attached to the famous 29th Division, but

he was not in time for the landing at Cape Helles. He arrived in July and took part in the August fighting. He described the pitiful lack of reinforcements during the Sulva Bay attempt, and spoke with admiration of the men who took the Anifarta Ridge. " I dunno 'ow they did it, but they did, and there they 'ung on, though they'd lost all their officers, and fifty per cent. of their men killed. Re-inforcements was sent for, and we was told to go. D'yer know 'ow many men there was left in my company ? Ten ! And t'other company 'ad eighteen ! "

As an old soldier he spoke of Gallipoli as a hopeless task. The Turks were on the hills, and had all the advantages of position, so that they kept the whole British camp under shell-fire. " Yet in spite of everythng, Sister, we'd 'ave done it, if only we'd 'ad a few men with grit in 'em for generals." He talked of the Turks as clean fighters, who avoided shelling the hospital huts, though they were well within range. The only exception occurred when one of our batteries was placed too near a hut. The Turks sent down word, " If you don't move your battery, we won't answer for the safety of your hospital," and they dropped one or two shells to prove their assertion. The battery was hastily removed.

The sergeant was of opinion that the hardships of Gallipoli were worse than those of France, and as he had fought in both he had a right to give his view. The impossibility of ever being safe from shelling, unless one had the good luck to be sent

to one of the neighbouring islands like Mudros, was one draw-back, and another was the lack of water, which had to be brought by ship from a great distance, till at last the Royal Engineers dug an entirely new set of wells. Then there was the uncertainty of supplies, due to the submarine menace and other perils of the waters. Day after day there would be the hopeful query, " Any fresh meat to-night, Quartermaster," and the disappointing reply " Not to-night, my lad, the lighter's sunk." " We couldn't sleep by day for the flies, nor by night for the Turks " summed up another disadvantage. Altogether the campaign was anything but a picnic, and the sergeant and his chum, another old regular, told me one or two grim tales of it which I will not write down. Men who have been through nearly two years of such a war as this become terribly hardened to bloodshed.

The types of men I have met out here have been extraordinarily varied. At the opposite pole from this little war-hardened sergeant was a delicate dreamy Scotch boy of eighteen, who had enlisted when he was only sixteen. He had had a serious illness during his training in England, and now the trenches had shattered his nerves for the time being. At first he was painfully shy in hospital, and could hardly answer the simplest question intelligibly, but gradually his courage began to return. I gave him one or two easy jobs to do in the wards, and his delight at finding himself of some small use was pathetic.

I discovered that he had been in camp for some time at a place in the Highlands which I know well, and great was his pleasure when I produced some post-cards of it. These boys of seventeen and eighteen are really too young for the trenches, as the War Office seems to have discovered at last, for it is sending back most of them till they are nineteen. Other men have told me that their spirit is often splendid, but in general their nerves do not stand the constant bombardment as well as those of their elders. On the other hand men over thirty-eight find the cold and exposure terribly trying, and all through the winter we had cases of pneumonia, bronchitis, and myalgia from amongst them. Even men of thirty-five are apt to wish themselves younger. I remember one, a Scotch miner, who said to me, " Sister, I've done my bit. I'm getting old and worn-out. Let the young men have a turn."

This particular Scotsman had no love for the kilt, perhaps because he was a lowlander, who had joined a Highland regiment. He complained that it was a very cold dress on a windy day, and unsuitable if one was in the company of ladies—an opinion with which I did not at all agree, for I love to see a regiment of ' kilties ' go by. However, he was cut to the heart on discovering when about to leave hospital that his kilt had lost all its shape and comeliness in the process of fumigation. Indeed, it was so creased and shrunk as to be hardly presentable. " It's nae dacent, Sister,"

he remarked bitterly to me, " 'twas a gran' new kilt, and noo 'tis destroyed." I offered to iron it for him, and he watched my efforts anxiously, and told me his hope that when he got his discharge (which he was expecting immediately, on account of his deafness) the kilt would be useful for his children. " 'Twill make a fine skirt for the lassie, or maybe kilts for the two wee laddies."

The ' Jocks,' as the other men call them, are a constant joy to us. A Scotsman's mind seems to work so differently from an Englishman's, and he delights in argument and theological discussion. One old Scotsman, who belonged to the very poorest class, could not learn to make his bed properly. When he was scolded for its untidy appearance he pleaded that he was not used to sleeping in a bed, and added, " Our Lord waurna used to it neither. Ye ken He had not where to lay His head." Fortunately the V.A.D. who reproved him was also Scotch. " And if He had, He wad hae made it better than that," she retorted quickly, pointing to the dishevelled blankets.

I think that, though all our men are dear to us, the Highlanders have the warmest corner of my heart. And next to them I should put the Londoners—a fact that I should never have expected before the war. Everybody knows that the Scotch make magnificent soldiers, and in addition they have a special claim on me because some of the happiest times of my life

have been spent in the Highlands. I have made friends with many Stewarts and Grants and McLeans by talking with them of Ben Nevis or Skye, Kingussie and Tomintoul. "It wad melt a man's heart if he waur to see that in the trenches," said Private Grant wistfully as he looked at a picture of Loch Morlich with the Cairngorms rising behind. But one does not think of Cockneys as soldiers—yet the London Regiments have made a name for themselves at the front, and certainly in hospital they are delightful, so good-tempered and full of jokes.[1]

Out here with the B.E.F. there is not much time for reading, but poetry has resumed something of its ancient power to console and strengthen and revive the spirit of man. Novels, though useful enough when one is sick, are either too exciting or too incongruous with our daily work, and we have no time or energy for books that demand close study. But in the long watches of the night, when the sick or wounded are sleeping quietly round us, or in our hours off duty, when we can lie for a little while on the cliff among the sea-pinks and the tall white daisies and bask in the warm sunshine and the salt sea-breeze, then is the time to take out a thin volume of Rupert Brooke's or James Elroy Flecker's and lose ourselves in the beauty that is never old and never

[1] Of course I am only expressing a personal preference here, but a friend of mine, a V.A.D. in a military hospital at home, tells me that she too would put Scotsmen and Londoners highest on the list. We differ, however, as to who should come next.

tires. My sister sent me last Christmas a book of "Georgian Poetry," and in it there is much delight for tired minds. Here is Walter de la Mare's "Music."—

"When music sounds, gone is the earth I know,
And all her lovely things even lovelier grow;
Her flowers in vision flame, her forest trees
Lift burdened branches, stilled with ecstasies.

When music sounds, all that I was I am
Ere to this haunt of brooding dust I came;
And from Time's woods break into distant song
The swift-winged hours, as I haste along.

and John Drinkwater's "Of Greatham," with its remembrances of the beloved land from which for a while we are exiles:

"For peace, than knowledge more desirable,
Into your Sussex quietness I came,
When summer's green and gold and azure fell
Over the world in flame.

And peace upon your pasture-lands I found,
Where grazing flocks drift on continually,
As little clouds that travel with no sound
Across a windless sky."

There is John Masefield's unforgotten picture of the *Wanderer*:

"Come as of old a queen, untouched by Time,
Resting the beauty that no seas could tire,
Sparkling, as though the midnight's rain were rime,
Like a man's thought transfigured into fire.

Even better, I think, do I love James Elroy Flecker's song of the "Gates of Damascus," with its vision of the four Grand Wardens leaning on their spears, and the four roads that lead,

one to gay Aleppo, one to Mecca the holy, one to the burning desert, and one to the enchanted sea.

And yet, powerful as is the spell of these, I turn more often to the thin volume of Rupert Brooke's "1914," and find there solace and refreshment. It has the thirst for beauty that marks the other Georgian poets, the delight in every quick and vivid movement of the senses, but it has something more too—a perception of the 'soul of the war' that lifts it into the realm of great and tragic things. More than any other poet of the time, Rupert Brooke interpreted and embodied the spirit in which our men have gone to this fight—not from blind lust of battle or desire of conquest, not as slaves driven to the slaughter by a military tyrant, but with clear eyes and steady hands, keenly conscious of the joy of life, of all that they are relinquishing, yet willing and un-afraid. To us here, who have so often to tend the dying and grieve for the dead, it is good to know how friendly Death looked to one who was so soon to face it :

"We have found safety with all things undying,
The winds, and morning, tears of men and mirth,
The deep night, and birds singing, and clouds flying,
And sleep, and freedom, and the autumnal earth.
We have built a house that is not for Time's throwing.
We have gained a peace unshaken by pain for ever.
War knows no power. Safe shall be my going,
Secretly armed against all death's endeavour;
Safe though all safety's lost; safe where men fall;
And if these poor limbs die, safest of all."

On Easter Eve we went into the woods to gather primrose-roots to plant on the graves of our men who lie in a corner of the little French churchyard. We decked the graves and made them fair, and it was some comfort to us that we could do this for our dead, but Rupert Brooke has voiced for us a deeper consolation in that wonderful sonnet of his :

If I should die, think only this of me . . .

To me, however, Rupert Brooke has yet one more appeal, and that a personal and private one. He was my contemporary at Cambridge, and though I never spoke to him, I saw him as the Attendant Spirit in the performance of Comus on Milton's tercentenary in 1909. Thus he is linked with my happy college days, and he has expressed, more perfectly than any other poet I know, the peculiar charm of Cambridge for her children. To read over that poem of his, " The Old Vicarage, Grantchester," written by a strange irony of fate, in a Berlin café, is to see again, among the woods of Normandy, the quiet river that slowly wanders down through reeds and rushes past the golden meadows of Grantchester to the town I love . It is to recapture, in the strain and stress of a large base hospital, the sights and sounds and scents that wove themselves years ago into my very being. I know not why the spirit of man should thus cleave wth strong endurance to certain spots of earth, but thus it is, and let Rupert Brooke answer for me :

I only know that you may lie
Day long and watch the Cambridge sky,
And, flower-lulled in sleepy grass,
Hear the cool lapse of hours pass,
Until the centuries blend and blur
In Grantchester, in Grantchester.
. . . Ah God ! to see the branches stir
Across the moon at Grantchester !
To smell the thrilling sweet and rotten
Unforgetable, unforgotten
River-smell, and hear the breeze
Sobbing in the little trees

The Aftermath of the Big Push

(July, 1916).

Having a bit of a lull now after the big rush last week.[1] It was on Sunday fortnight (June 25) that we heard the bombardment begin. I didn't hear the guns myself that day, as I never went up the cliff, but the others were all talking about the noise. It was on Monday night that I heard them first, and after that they went on almost continuously for the rest of the week. Leave was stopped at the end of June—I was to have gone home on July 4th—and on Sunday, July 2nd, the rush here began. On the preceding Thursday we had had a convoy of very heavy cases, many of them from among the gunners, but it was not a very large one, and the hospital had been practically emptied of all its previous patients. On Sunday two trains arrived, bringing about a thousand wounded between them, and when we came on duty in the evening we found the place crowded. Many of the cases were fairly slight ones, but the men seemed decidedly depressed, as they had seen their officers and comrades mown down by machine-fire. I had a sort of dressing-station on the second floor landing, and the walking cases came along and stood in a queue waiting to have their wounds dressed.

[1] This chapter was scribbled at odd moments during July, 1916.

Sister was dressing the worse cases in the bunk, and we worked away steadily till about 11 p.m. Then they went to bed for a little while, and at one o'clock they had to get up again to go in the motor ambulances to the hospital ship. The street was a weird sight between 1 and 2 a.m. with the motors throbbing away, and the orderlies bringing out the stretcher cases, and the slightly wounded in their khaki standing in the road and talking and wondering when their turn would come. There were too many for the cars, so most of our men had to come back and wait till the morning. It was a cold windy night, so I gave a few of them hot milk to warm them up, but most of them fell asleep again almost as soon as their heads touched the pillows.

The next day there were two trains in again, bringing over 900 men, and these were much worse cases than we had had the day before. The slightly wounded always come first, as they can walk back to the dressing station ; it is only later that we get the bad cases, who have had to lie out for one or two days before they can be fetched. The Night Superintendent and I went round the wards with trays and dressed their wounds. The day sisters stayed on till midnight to help, but it was a long business.

On Tuesday no convoy arrived, so we were able to make a start at getting to know our patients, but the next day there were again two trains in, and some of the cases were very bad ones, so the work, even in my block, was very

heavy. We had men with frightful head, shoulder, back and leg wounds, and we could not get them taken to the theatre for operation, as the staff there were terribly busy working day and night on urgent cases from the Casino. One day they did 33 operations there, and in the week two hundred operations were performed. It was heart-rending not to be able to give our patients proper attention, but with such large numbers it was impossible to look after each case thoroughly. I had about a hundred patients in my block, distributed on four different floors, and my orderly had to look after the patients in the block opposite as well, and one night we had some lying out in the little courtyard too. While the orderly was away looking after these other cases, I had to do his work as well as my own, so I was kept on the run the whole night. Fortunately the Night Superintendent, who is a wonderful woman, generally made my block her headquarters, and did the worst dressings herself, but one night she had to look after a big ward in the Casino where there was no Sister for the time being, and I had to do all the dressings, some of them terribly big ones, and syringe the wounds that needed it.

The trained nurses in the other blocks had an even worse time. Fancy one woman in sole charge of two hundred serious cases, her only helpers inexperienced orderlies who had lately come out to France! The fact that our half-a-dozen separate blocks of buildings were none of

them made for a hospital, but were formerly hotels, places of amusement, or private houses, makes the work far more difficult. The Night Superintendent has to walk long distances in making her round, and the flights of hotel stairs (we have no lifts) are very trying. However, by the end of the week the rush was over, though occasional convoys continued to arrive. We were all fairly tired out, and glad to be able to take things rather more easily, though there were still a number of bad cases, too ill to be sent to England, and all through the following weeks there were deaths among these.

Oh, the pity of it!—the poor wounded broken creatures moaning and calling on God Who made them, screaming at the slightest touch, raving in delirium, or lying there unconscious with glazed eyes and heavy breathing. The wards were like hell through that first week in July. One night I felt that I had never thought that hell itself could be as bad as this. Generally one can concentrate one's attention on a single bad case and give him constant care, but here were fearfully wounded men moaning and calling all around. One night my eye fell on a newspaper headline, "Victory cheaply bought," and it seemed a most ghastly mockery. From the military point of view, of course, the losses may have been comparatively few in number considering the advantage gained—of that, I know nothing. But I do know that no victory should ever be called cheap that is bought at the cost of such

mortal anguish as filled our hospitals in that first week.

I have had horrors enough to last me my whole life, but still I don't think I would have missed it if I had been given my choice. It is something to feel that one has shared in any way in what the men have had to bear, and that one is a real integral part of the B.E.F. There is a curious community of suffering in which one is glad to have been allowed to take one's part. Dimly I seem to apprehend something of what is meant by " the fellowship of Christ's sufferings," and of the necessity that lay on the Son of God that, forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He Himself should also take part in the same.

These constant deaths certainly get on one's nerves. In the four nights, July 9-12, there were three deaths in the ward whilst I was on duty [not alone, I am glad to say], besides deaths in the day. Still, the men do appreciate our care, and I think their friends would be glad to know that there were English hands to tend them at the last, and English voices in their ears. " Sister, it's good to be looked after," said one of the men to me in the rush. And in their pain all night long they call for " Sister." " Sister, can I have a drink ? " " Sister, will you alter my pillows for me ? " " Sister, will you give me something to

[1] In my original jottings I gave here a more detailed account of one or two cases, but I see no use in harrowing readers' feelings unnecessarily.

make me sleep ? " or even, from a dying man, " Sister, stay by me and hold my hand."

Some of them are mere boys, lads of eighteen, seventeen, and even fifteen. One boy of eighteen, from the North of Ireland, had been in the army two years. He had a bad abdominal wound, and I held him whilst Sister dressed it. He was such a thin little lad, with the flush of fever in his cheeks, and as I held him he put one arm round my neck to steady himself and laid his head on my shoulder while he moaned and begged Sister not to syringe his wound, as the tube ran right into his kidney. However, when the wound was dressed, and I laid him down again, he admitted that he was much easier, and that it had done him good to change the dressing. Sister told him that he would soon be able to go back to ' Blighty,' to be someone else's little lad, but he said his mother was dead—however, there are sisters to look after him, so he tells us.

At present I am spending most of my time on a single patient—a boy of nineteen, who has had three mastoid operations and has been in hospital over six weeks. He is very ill indeed—complications set in a few days ago—but however much his head hurts him, he never says anything stronger than " Oh dear, oh dear ! Sister, my 'ead, my 'ead ! " He is one of the gentlest and best of patients, and everybody is fond of him. With his head swathed in bandages, from which a white childlike face peeps out, he reminds me

strangely of the White Rabbit. Last night I heard queer sounds proceeding from his room (he is in a small ward by himself, and I am in charge alone of the whole block, which has only a few patients in it). Looking in I found him singing softly to himself in a poor little hoarse cracked voice. I could not recognize the tune, but I listened carefully to the words, and at last I caught

> " Where the dear Lord was crucified
> Who died to save us all."

He was crooning over " There is a green hill far away," and when he had finished I said, " My mother taught me that too when I was little.' He paused a minute and then said longingly, " Oh, Sister, I *do* so want to see them all at home '"[1]

I have not met many of the so-called ' gentleman rankers,' but I have come to the conclusion that the ranks of the British Army are filled with gentlemen in the best sense of the word. A nurse of the B.E.F. is sure of the gentlest, most respectful treatment from the men she tends. These patients must come, many of them, from homes where very little refinement is possible, but they will take the utmost care to do and say nothing that might jar on her. There is no loose talking as long as she is in the ward, and though

[1] I am glad to say he pulled through, and has now been sent home to England. When I last saw him, just before I was sent home on sick leave, he was walking about in hospital ' blues,' and was chaffing me on the large number of chickens I should eat when I got back to ' Blighty '—I had once remarked that I was tired of bully beef and ration bacon, and envied him the chicken diet on which he was convalescing.

the British Army is said to ' swear terribly in Flanders,' she will hardly ever hear an oath unless the patient is delirious.

The self-restraint of the men is marvellous. It is quite a delusion to picture the British soldier as a thick-skinned Stoic, who never feels any pain or at any rate shows no sign of it. I have been in a ward where man after man broke down and cried like a child whilst his wound, in each case a truly terrible one, was being dressed. The modern Tommy is often a highly-strung individual, very sensitive to pain, and it is all the more to his credit that he should so seldom give vent to strong language in hospital, and should be ready to stuff the pillow into his mouth as I have seen him do, lest he should utter a cry which would wake a sleeping ' pal ' with a still worse wound.

But this is only a negative virtue—the positive side is seen in his readiness to help, his cheerfulness, his generosity in sharing whatever good things fall to his lot. A parcel from home for one of the men is a signal for a general feast, and ' Sister ' will be urged to partake, and have chocolates and sweets of all kinds, and even bottles of scent, thrust upon her. One of my Jocks had a parcel the other day, and the day sister and I were overwhelmed with bars of chocolate and packets of ' Forfar rock '—which we were solemnly assured was the very best peppermint in Scotland. They are so grateful, too, for the care that has been taken of them. The other night a man lying between life and

death apologized to me for the trouble he was giving, and in hoarse broken tones said that he knew he was very lucky—there were hundreds, no, thousands worse than he was.

The bravest man I have had, I think, was one who died a little while before the rush. He had a terrible wound in the back, and gas gangrene had set in, but he was perfectly conscious and cheerful. When I came to look after him in the evening, they told me there was no hope, but he was so cheerful that I could hardly believe it. He lived through the night, and one of the orderlies who came in from another ward to help in the early morning, remarked afterwards, "Well, you don't expect to find the man that you're told is dying the most cheerful man in the ward!" His dressing had to be changed twice, but he uttered no complaint, though other men in the ward, who were not half as ill, cried out with pain when their turn came, and he helped us as much as he could in raising himself and turning over—indeed we had to order him not to exert himself so much. The only thing that troubled him was a terrible restlessness which allowed him no sleep. I said a little prayer with him for rest—he was too weak to be given morphia, and nothing could be done. But when the morning came God gave him rest in Paradise.

It seems to me that during these last few weeks I have been gaining a new understanding of death as only an episode in life. The beauty of sky and cliff and sea, to which I come out every

morning, would be almost intolerable to me, did I not believe that these poor shattered creatures, who were strong men such a little while ago, are not shut off from life and its beauty for ever, but are part of it now more fully than they ever were before.

The Gentlest Art in Hospital

The 'gentlest art' of letter-writing is certainly the one most practised by our men in hospital. The first thing for which a man who comes down wounded or sick will ask is often a sheet of paper so that he may 'send a line home.' Nurses, of course, are not allowed to act as censors, so I have not had the opportunities of which many officers—'Ian Hay,' for example—have made such good use in showing us the half-humorous, half-pathetic side of the family correspondence of the B.E.F. Sometimes, however, a patient will take us into his confidence, as did one man who showed me with some pride the verses he was sending to his wife. I have forgotten th earlier stanzas, but the last two ran thus :

Do not quite, I beg, forget me,
Keep for me a little spot,
In the depths of your affection.
Plant a sweet forget-me-not.
Though distant miles may part us,
And thee I cannot see,
Remember it's Bert your hubby
That sends these lines to thee.

Such fluency, however, is rare, and when I see the former miner or field labourer struggling painfully with that unaccustomed implement, a pen, I hope that the wife or mother on the other side will not be disappointed at the scanty amount of news, but will understand how much effort and labour have gone to the production of those

stereotyped sentences—" Hoping this finds you well, as it leaves me in bed," and the like.

Lacking the opportunities of the censor, I must confine myself to those soldiers' letters which have come to me personally, or to another nurse in the ward, for we have a sort of community in the letters sent us by old patients. Many of the men are very good in writing to thank us after they have left hospital.[1] Most of those who have gone to England concern themselves chiefly with details of the journey, as in the following letter written soon after the blizzard in March this spring :

DEAR SISTER,

Just a few lines to let you know that I arrived quite safe in England ; it was a very long journey for us as the train service was very slow on account of the telegraph wires being smashed up so, but I was very Pleased to get settled down again we was 24 hours on the boat before we started from —— and when we got to —— it took the train 13 hours to come to here it was One Oclock on thursday morning when we arrived here so we was on the way a long time from monday at noon but I did not mind that as long as we got here alright it is a very large Hospital where I am at Present and we are having some very nice weather here just now and I hope I shall soon be able to get out a bit I am going on very nicely at present give my best Resp [*i.e.* respects] to the Orderley and McGuire [another patient] if he is still there so I must close now with the best of luck to you.

I Remain Yours Resp Pte. S. M——

1 The letters quoted in this chapter have been chosen very carefully in order to avoid giving any possible offence to their writers. I have received other letters, still more delightful in their way, from which I do not feel at liberty to quote without their writers' permission.

One letter from a driver in the R.F.A. proved disappointingly short, though it occupied two large sheets of paper :

DEAR MISS SPEARING

Just a line to let you know I arrived back to England at this Hospital quite safe but I am about the same in health. I will be glad when I am able to a good Nights sleep. Well Sister we did not leave ——till ¼ to 11 o'clock on Sunday morning and by the time we arrived at —— it was 9 o'clock at Nigh and by the time we left their to this Hospital it [was] 2 o'clock on Monday morning. Well Sister It is a very nice Hospital where I am and very nice Place. I hope you will remember me to the sisters and tell them I am about the same. Well Sister I think this is all I have to say now hoping this letter will still find you in the best of health and also the other sisters good bye.

From Driver A. T—.

P.S. Please excuse Pencel.

There is a more individual flavour about this letter from a fair curly-headed boy who was evidently determined to make the best of everything. It nearly failed to reach me, as it was wrongly addressed :

DEAR MISS SPEARING

Very pleased to tell you I arrived quiet safely after a very good crossing we were sent from Southampton and the officiles ask us where our destination was so there were several of us said London well we were put in a Hospital train which I must say is a very nice arrangment and when the journey was finished we found ourselves at Exeter. we were received by V.A.D. strechers bearers all under an officer of the R.A.M.C. I was placed in a Motor Car kindly lent by a shopkeeper of the town as we went through the

streets we were cheered by the people of the town. we were received in the hospital by a civilian doctor under government of corse and I was sent to ward 6 there we have been very well looked after every attention is given us day and night. . . . Private N—— who was in room 8 wishes to be remembered to you I might mention we are both in the same ward which only holds 6. I must bring my letter to close. whishing you every success and good helth,

I remain

Yours Sincerly

Rfm L ——

P.S. Plese give my regards to the Corporal.

Some of the letters are full of gratitude for the treatment which the writers had received in France, and not all of them are sure that they have benefited by the change to their new hospitals. One man says, " Well sister i may say that i am glad to say that i am on this side of the Channell but for treatment i would rather be at No. Z." A sergeant writing to the Sister in charge of my ward described the new conditions in which he found himself, and added, " Of course you can understand all this when I tell you that it is a workhouse, you know what I mean worked on town counsel principles. . . You told me a few times that I should wish that I was back over there and I assure you that you was right, I shall always appreciate the kindness that I had shown to me there and I hope that you will thank them all both sisters and orderlys on my behalf for the way I was treated

and if it ever happens to come in my way that I can return it I shall do so."

Another man says gallantly, " The Nurses are a fine lot here but not so good as they were at No. Z." There is a pleasant touch of marital devotion in Sergeant B.'s description of his new hospital, " They are not bad, the folks here. The treatment is lay in bed and wait and see the results and when you are fit they send you on convalecent for a month to different parts of the county, and then 10 days leave but some prefer leave straight away and go without the convalesent well, I shall not be sorry when Im with the wife, for as the saying is, Im dying for her, awful isn't it being married."

Perhaps I ought not to quote another letter in full, but pride in the achievements of our ward No. Z. forbids me to omit this epistle from a patient who had been at death's door with pneumonia. It was sent to the Sister in charge, and she and I rejoiced together over the joke about 'ell.

DEAR MISS C——

You will see by the above address that I have arrived here . . . Of the two Hospitals I much prefer No. Z. They have the wrong number on this Ward L 2. It is far too cold to be called L. It is a long corrider about 70 yards in length with open shutters, and I have not been warm since I arrived here, it is frightfully cold . . . To-day Monday he [the doctor] came and examined us, he said, I had got over my complaint so well, it was difficult to believe I had been ill. I told him I had received very skillful treatment,

and good nursing at ——, and he ventured to smile, rather loud. I had a bad time crossing, and was sick all the way over, but afterwards was as hungry as a hunter, some ladies came on the train and gave us tea, biscuits, chocolate, and cigarettes . . . The Dr. wrote down all Particulars of my illness to-day, Place, and symptoms, and hospital where I was treated at, He seems a very nice man, only he does not pay the attention to the cases as *our Dr.* did at No. Z. I told them here, that all the best Drs. and Sisters were in France, and got a smack on the head for it, only not a hard one of course . . . I was treated so well at No Z. that I shall always remember it, and if I come back to France, will try to see you again. Now I must dry up, it has taken me a long time to write this letter because my hand is so cold, I can scarcely hold the Pencil, and I am not too strong in the fingers yet. Now for the Present I wish you good-Bye, and Good Luck.

from your old Patient

W. J. P.

Letters also reach us from the men who have gone back to the front, but fear of the censor generally makes them omit all reference to the battles in which they take part. Occasionally there is a reference to some particularly narrow shave, as in a letter from Driver B. of the R.F.A., who remarks " The other day three shells droped about five yards off, one in front one behind and the side of us, still we are none the worse for it," but usually the fighting is only described in general terms such as " The Huns are getting their own medicine served out to them and I don't think they like it, we are having some lovly weather here now, which makes things better for everybody." One letter written in the middle of

the great Battle of the Somme is occupied entirely with the writer's gratitude for a small parcel sent him and his disgust with the cold wet weather of the last two days. The same man remarks that it takes a little time to ' settle down ' again after being in hospital, as ' one misses all the luxuries."

I have some other letters which are among my most prized possessions, for in them the patient becomes the friend who lets one see something of his real inner self. A motor transport man sends a photograph of his little girl, with words on the back, " From Gwennie to the nurse who has been kind to her Daddy," and he adds that he will certainly follow the advice given him, as he is afraid that if he gets another attack of illness he will become a cripple for life—" so I must take great care seeing as I have my little cot to keep going." Another writes enthusiastically of the beauty of the new camp to which he has gone " with vast hills on two sides of us, where the snow has not yet melted, and on the other side a great plain stretching as far as eye can see." And sometimes the veil is lifted yet further, and one catches a glimpse of something infinitely lovable and courageous—the real inner man struggling valiantly in spite of physical weakness, and the burdens of home anxieties, against the terrible loneliness and temptations of army life in a foreign land.

I have one more letter which I cannot forbear to quote, though it was written neither by nor to a soldier. It is from a little boy in Jersey who

had sent an egg to the hospital egg collection fund and had written on it his address and the words "Please write if the egg is fresh." It happened that this was the first egg that I gave, beaten up in milk, to the 'White Rabbit' when he began to mend, and it was beautifully fresh, so I thought I would write a short letter to the giver, and this was the answer I received, in a very childish hand:

DEAR NURSE

I am writing, thanking you for your kind letter which I received on Friday night when I came from school. We did not know that there was a letter. When I saw a letter on the our mantleshelf, I thought it was a letter from my father, and when my [mother ?] looked at the letter it was for me. My father is a French Prisoner of War in Germany. . . I have got an uncle and a brother-in-law at the front. My uncle is between La Bassée and Neuve Chappelle my brother-in-law is somwhere in France. My sister who 21 years of age died the 8th March 1915. My father was made prisoner the 22nd of April 1915. He went at the front the 1st January 1915. He was in front of the Yser Canal. . . I have yet a cousin at the front. I am incapable and I have a little 3 year old sister. I have won 5 certificates of being the 2nd and 1st at school. I am eleven years old. Nurse the soldier well please so that he may go yet to fight the Germans. I am now going to close my letter

Your sincerely friend

JOHN.

I forgot to tell you dear nurse that we have a little concert every Wednesdays at school for the 4th Bn South Staffords.

Songs in the Night.

Music hath charms—but not at half-past five in the morning, in a ward full of serious cases. So I stopped the enthusiastic patient who had set the gramophone going at that early hour, but the incident shows how keen the men are on music of one kind or another, from the eighteen-penny mouth organ played on the march, to one of Lena Ashwell's delightful concerts in a big hall at Boulogne or Havre. In fact my whole time in hospital seems to have been spent to an accompaniment of different tunes, changing as the war went on from 'Tipperary' in the early days at Cambridge to 'Keep the home fires burning,' that suited so strangely well with the winter nights and the darkness pierced by the flames from the charcoal braziers of my first camp hospital, on through 'When Irish eyes are smiling' that haunted the big base, to 'The Sunshine of your Smile,' and 'The long trail winding,' heralding the Somme.

The B.E.F. craves music of some sort, and it is surely the healthiest and best of the diversions which a soldier far from home can seek. The Y.M.C.A. huts owe much of their attraction, I am sure, to the strains that float out from them most nights of the week. And in hospital a concert is almost the greatest pleasure that can be provided for nurses and patients too. The music need not be classical, nor the performers first-rate artists—though many of the men are

far keener judges of good music than outsiders imagine. In the wards we talk about a concert for days afterwards, and while the up patients make their beds or wash up dishes they whistle bars of the latest new song.

I have many pleasant memories of concerts of very varying degrees of excellence, held in very different kinds of buildings. There was the one arranged by the Colonel of my first hospital, when we all crowded into the Y.M.C.A. hut to hear a special Irish programme—though the rest of the United Kingdom was represented also. The hit of the evening was made by an officer, who sang comic songs and danced about on the stage with the most delightful Irish *abandon*. Then there was the concert, not quite so successful, in a large tent on a fearfully wet evening when the rain threatened to come in, and a sergeant with a very loud voice sang a song about ' Khaki boys so brave and true.' There was the highly successful, but too brief visit of one of Lena Ashwell's concert parties to our big ward on Christmas Day, when we joined with delight in the chorus of " Old John Braddalum " and other English folk-songs. But more often I remember the Saturday night ' home-made ' concerts that gladdened us week by week duing the spring at my last hospital.

The scene is generally the same—the big entrance hall of the hotel where our medical cases are housed. The hall itself is full of up-patients in their blues, with a sprinkling of orderlies, and on

the stairs behind, commanding a good view of the performers, are a number of nurses and V.A.D.s with perhaps a few medical officers and some belated patients.

We are all in the mood for enjoyment. The B.E.F. does not take its pleasures sadly. People at home sometimes think that the uncertainty of life at the front must make men sober and serious, but experience proves the contrary. Not that war may not, in many cases, have given men a new sense of underlying reality, and a deep steadiness of purpose. But on the surface, at any rate, the re-action from the strain of the trenches shows itself often in bursts of high spirits and a desire to make plenty of noise. Moreover, we all live very much for the day, and let the morrow take care of itself. Half these men were not here a week ago, and the other half will not be here next week. Even the sisters and V.A.D.s know that they may be sent to another hospital, hundreds of miles away, at two or three hours' notice, and may have to leave all their friends and acquaintances behind. So we make the most of our pleasures while we have them, and the men light their pipes or cigarettes and the nurses exchange jokes and pieces of gossip until the music begins and all noise is hushed.

The programme does not vary much from week to week. The audience is constantly changing, as the men are sent off to England or back to duty, so old items do duty again and again. " Y.M.C.A.' —*i.e.* the man who is in charge of the hut—

presides at the piano, and gives us " Here we are, here we are, here we are again " or similar choruses for a start. Then Private Brown, a pale young orderly with a pleasant tenor voice, springs upon the deal table that serves as a stage and gives us " Because I love you so," which is received with great applause. Corporal Higgins and Lance-Corporal Robinson sing a duet, in which they are hideously out of tune, but the audience bear it with polite patience, though an occasional snigger is heard, I fear, from the stair-case. Then comes our humourist, a middle-aged orderly with the most doleful of countenances, who sings a comic song called " Nobody," which draws roars of delight from the house. He is encored, and gives us " What's nicer than a s'nice nice ice ? " or some similar favourite, and we all settle down to enjoy ourselves thoroughly. A sick officer who is almost ready to return to duty is next prevailed on to mount the table, and warbles tunefully of roses and nightingales. He is much applauded, and then Private Mills gives his famous comic recitation of the collision which wrecked the " 11.69 " down train. The staircase finds the jokes a little flat, this being the fifty-second time that they have listened to Private Mills, but the body of the hall is delighted. A nervous V.A.D. sings " The sunshine of your smile," and we all back her up in the chorus ; Corporal Brown tries a new patriotic song, which falls a little flat ; the Sergeant-Major, in a big bass voice, sings " I'm only an old bargee,"

and then the Padre, who has been in great form distributing cigarettes, announcing singers, and guiding late-comers to empty seats, gives the signal for " God Save the King," and all is over. Not a programme that would appeal to the sophisticated, perhaps, but then there is not much room for the sophisticated in the B.E.F.

Undoubtedly the favourite items of the performance are the comic and the sentimental. Vocal patriotism is rather at a discount with men who have already hazarded their lives for their country. Still, I have heard a good singer—one of Miss Lena Ashwell's company, if I remember right—render Elgar's " Land of Hope and Glory " with great effect. It was strangely moving to hear these men, broken in England's cause, joining with heart and voice in the great chorus :

> " Wider still and wider
> Shall thy bounds be set.
> God Who made thee mighty
> Make thee mightier yet."

Humour, however, is more in demand, and it is generally of a primitive and obvious, not over-refined, type. References to kisses, mothers-in-law, the early stages of drunkenness, and No. 9 Army pills are sure to raise a laugh, but there is no indecency or ridicule of goodness. I once heard some performers from a neighbouring camp sing one or two mildly vulgar songs, but the applause was faint. On special occasions such as Christmas Eve, the humourists will

raise a nigger troupe or band of pierrots, and we shall be satiated with coon songs, rag-time ditties, and dialogues full of hoary jokes—with some new ones thrown in—between Uncle Sambo and the leading comedian. I don't know what we should do without these safety-valves for excitement, and the nurses are as keen on these performances as the men themselves.

I must confess that the popularity of the sentimental songs puzzles me more. The men get up with the utmost seriousness and sing songs about home and mother and sweetheart who are waiting for the gallant khaki lads, in a way that either brings a lump into your throat or, more often, moves untimely mirth within. One night an orderly sang "Somebody's Boy," and being unfamiliar with the word 'brunt,' changed it to 'blunt,' so the whole audience sang solemnly after each verse :

"Somebody's boy is out at the front,
Somebody's boy is bearing the *blunt.*"

A day or two afterwards I heard Maguire, one of our convalescent patients, singing most cheerfully as he washed up the pots and pans in the scullery :

"Somebody's heart is aching,
Aching, almost breaking."

Again, there was something incongruous in the sight of the men in one ward listening with apparent enjoyment to a gramophone grinding out a song meant for 'slackers' in England :

"What will you do, sonny, what will you do
When the boys come marching home ?"

It is not only at the Saturday night concerts that the men sing. Sometimes there are choruses in the wards, and at the Sunday services, attendance at which is voluntary, there is a great volume of sound. The old familiar hymns are the favourites—" Jesu, Lover of my soul," " Fight the good fight," " Rock of Ages," and " Abide with me "—but certain newer ones are welcomed too. Sitting at the window of the isolation block one summer evening, I heard from the Y.M.C.A. near by the strains of a hymn which I first heard at a student conference at Conishead in my college days—" Oh Love that will not let me go "—and it brought back to me in the stress of hospital life a memory of the hills and the sea and the happy student life.

The men's voices went on through the two last verses :

Oh Joy that seekest me through pain
I dare not close my heart to thee,
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
And trust the promise is not vain,
That morn shall cloudless be.

Oh Cross that liftest up my head
I dare not seek to fly from thee,
I lay in dust life's glory dead,
And from the grave there blossoms red
Life that shall endless be.

So, whatever the song, our men go into the valley of death singing. And, which is perhaps even more wonderful, those who return come back to us singing too.

Cambridge Again.

HERE is Cambridge once more, with autumn tints in the trees of the Backs, and the creeper reddening on the grey college walls. It is an emptier town than it was when I started hospital work nearly two years ago. The troops are billeted here no more, the Belgians have gone to work in munition factories, the undergraduates are far fewer in number than they were in that first winter of the war.

I am not inclined to re-echo the old taunt that England is asleep about the war while France is awake. True, the sultry August beauty of the ripe cornfields through which my home-coming train passed was not suggestive of war-time, but there are many provinces of France equally untouched. Nothing could have been lovelier or more peaceful than the orchards of Normandy, full of apple-blossom, as I saw them last spring. Still, the atmosphere here is certainly different from that which prevails in the B.E.F., and I think what strikes one most in it is the prevalence of illusions, mostly sentimental ones. At home one continually meets such rash assumptions as that military discipline is uniformly good for everyone, that a turn in the trenches makes bad men into good and wastrels into strong silent heroes, that wounded soldiers like having nothing to do all day and going out

to tea with duchesses, that nobody gets drunk in France, that the war has turned all Frenchmen into devout Catholics, that everything in France is much more efficiently run than here, and that England is the only belligerent nation in which mistakes are made. Nobody believes all these fallacies at once, but they all seem to have a certain number of supporters. The B.E.F., being wholly intent on winning this particular war, is not nearly so convinced of the moral and spiritual advantages of war in general as its supporters at home are. It has no use for heroics, and its members, when they are invalided home, would rather be regarded as responsible human beings than as children to be amused with toys or lions to be fêted at Society functions. 'Our demigods in the trenches,' as I see one journalist calls them, know perfectly well that in ordinary circumstance they are very ordinary people, with an unfortunate weakness for getting drunk, and an inability to say 'No' to a pretty girl. They would rather have justice from the Government than charity from outsiders, and their bug-bear is, as many of them have told me, that when the war is over, and the cheering has died away, they will find themselves maimed and broken selling matches or bootlaces in the street.

Again, the precise value of military discipline is much more clearly appreciated in France. It makes men into soldiers; it does not and cannot make them into saints. Here it is loosely

praised as a panacea for every evil under the sun; on active service it is looked upon as a necessity truly, but often a regrettable one. Field Punishment No. 1 and other forms of correction show that a soldier's life is not inevitably one of high duties always willingly performed.

Similarly with regard to France. The French, who are the most clear-sighted and logical nation in Europe, would prefer us, I am sure, to love them for the qualities which they really possess rather than for their supposed temperance zeal or the efficiency of their railway service. It is quite easy still to get drunk in France—I have often seen it done, and travelling in England seems incredibly swift and easy after one has made a railway journey in France during wartime.

Still, if a sojourn with the B.E.F. destroys illusions, it also strengthens and deepens certain convictions, of which perhaps the most important is the belief in the extraordinary potentialities of the most ordinary man. It teaches one that nobody can be dismissed off-hand as commonplace, that a capacity for heroism exists very often where one would least suspect it, that human courage and loyalty can overcome pain, suffering, and fear—in short, that the spirit of man is the candle of God, and that there is no place too dark for it to lighten.

Often and longingly as the eyes of the B.E.F. turn towards 'Blighty,' the work out there has

a spell which those who have once known it find hard to break. For the first few weeks after I came home on sick leave, I could do little but rest and rejoice in the blissful sensation of having no work to do. When one has had but three ' off-days ' (including Sundays) in the last eight months, and half-days could almost be numbered on one's fingers, there is pleasure in the mere fact of sitting in the sunlight, watching the quiver of the leaves and the slow drift of the clouds across the sky. Soon, however, comes the desire for work again. I had not guessed till October arrived how strong would be the call of the B.E.F.—the desire to see again the little French town with its narrow streets, and the bright lights in the autumn dusk (for in France we take little heed of Zeppelins), and to share in the laughter and the comradeship and the hard day's work and the well-earned night's rest.

Here, however, is Cambridge, beautiful still, and playing manfully its part in the war. There are plenty of wounded soldiers to be cared for, and the blue or grey of the hospital uniform is seen all over the town. Here, too, are enduring things which not even the ravages of war shall sweep away—the slow quiet river that mirrors the willows on its bank, the tranquil dignity of the past, the memorials of great men dead. Outside the town the earth is wet and brown, newly-upturned from the plough. Blue smoke drifts across from the fields where stubble is

being burnt. There are brilliant leaves and scarlet berries in the hedgerows, and far off I can see the flame which autumn lights in the beechwoods on the hill.

I have been much in the country lately. I love the rising ground to the south of Cambridge, the fields of wheat and clover, the little beech woods, the disused chalk-pits, and above all our Gog-Magog Hills, which, though to scoffing strangers they may seem but as blisters of the ground, wear yet to true Cambridgeshire eyes a dignity worthy of honour and respect. I have known a man who lived at Shelford, a graduate of the University too, come back from a visit to the Alps with the words "And yet the Gogs look quite a good height after all!" It is in vain that the lovers of statistics tell us that the Gogs are but two hundred feet high, and that in Scotland or Wales, nay even in Shropshire or Sussex, no one would notice their existence at all. To most of us figures have no meaning in themselves, and two hundred feet in Cambridgeshire raises the climber as high above all obstacles to his view as two thousand would do in Wales or ten thousand in Switzerland. From the summit of the Gogs one can see the country for miles around—the homely village each with its church tower or spire, the white line of the roads, the grassy track of the old Roman highway bordered here and there by clumps of beeches, the yellow corn-fields, the pleasant green meadows. And the air blows fresh and sweet and clear, for there

is no obstacle between the Gogs and the distant sea, fifty or sixty miles away—nay, the geographers tell us that an airman could fly from the Gogs straight to the Ural Mountains, across the great plain of Central Europe, and meet no higher ground on the way.

This higher part of Cambridgeshire has a charm of its own, though it is less different than the fens from the rest of England. "The pleasant mountains of Balsham," as old Camden courteously designated the Gogs, shelter on their slopes and spurs many delightful villages, with whitewashed cottages and thatched roofs, and gardens in which bloom roses and sweet-william and tall old-fashioned hollyhocks. Each has its manor-house with a park and stately trees, and its little church of grey stone, where rich and poor may meet together, as they do at last under the grass of the churchyard. Pleasant names they have, these villages—Babraham, Pampisford, Hildersham, Great Abington, Little Abington, to mention but a few of them. They are no mushroom growth of yesterday, but strike their roots deep into the past of England. They were here when William the Norman made his Doomsday Book, and perchance they will still be here when William the German has been forgiven and forgotten. Their churches are linked with every century of England's growth. Here is a Saxon font, there a Norman chancel arch. On the walls of one is a dim fresco which some say stands for Edward the Second, in another is a

crusader's effigy carved out of a single block of wood, and another by its empty niches shows how it felt the furious zeal of Cromwell's men. But older than the churches, older than the villages themselves, are the roads that cross the country. There is the pleasant grassy track, full of deep ruts, and no longer used by any but farm carts, that runs from the Fulbourn Road to Horseheath, and is known as the " Roman Road," having once formed part of the Via Devana. And, white and dusty, there is still in use the great highway that runs through the south-east of Cambridgeshire on its way from Goring-on-Thames to Newmarket and beyond—the Icknield Street on which the men of prehistoric Britain journeyed from Wessex to the eastern fens.

This autumn the country has been more beautiful than ever, as if to show us how dear is this land for which so many of her sons have laid down their lives. Out in Flanders there are men who see it again in their dreams, even as there are others who hear at night the plash of the stream that finds its way down Snowdon, or taste the salt of the foam that washes the Outer Hebrides. " Although flat the country is very pretty, and reminds me of some of the fen villages at home," says one letter from the front. " The country is extraordinarily beautiful here, and slightly hilly ; it is not at all unlike parts of Cambridgeshire." " It reminds me very much of that round Ely ; it is full of orchards,

and rows of tall poplars and willows." The words may be prosaic ; the spirit that inspires them is the breath of all true poetry and patriotism. There is no Hymn of Hate that has half the magic that lies in one handful of English soil. " Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it." The cold waters of the North Sea, the floods of tears that are drenching Europe, the rivers of blood that redden the soil of France—they have all been tried in vain. Love is stronger than death. England gave these men much, and they have given her in return life itself—the life she had bred and nourished and ennobled. Henceforward she shall be more dear to us than ever, not only for her own sake, but for theirs.

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